

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, July 24, 2014 12:24 PM
To: FGC
Subject: Comments Aug 6th meeting agenda item

Re:
POSSIBLE ADOPTION OF EMERGENCY REGULATION TO ADD TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius tricolor*) TO THE LIST OF ENDANGERED SPECIES (PURSUANT TO SECTION 2076.5, FISH AND GAME CODE)

Dear Commission Members:

Following 14 years of field studies about tricolored blackbird population trends and reproductive success, we (Cook & Toft, 2005) demonstrated a significant population decline and its causation and future projections should meaningful remedies fail to materialize. Specifically, we showed widespread colony failure and low reproductive success in the remnants of the species' remaining native breeding habitats, whole-scale destruction of nests in dairy silage crops, and failure to protect non-native breeding substrates where reproductive success was favored. We predicted that should these factors continue in their scope and scale, that the species would approach function extinction in approximately 10 years.

That was 9 years ago. The recent observed decline from an estimated 400,000 in the 2008 census to the estimated 145,000 in the 2014 census is not surprising given that the causes of decline identified earlier, and their contributing factors, have remained unchanged and ongoing, while actionable conservation plans (suscon 2007, 2009) have been sparsely implemented at best.

It is my scientific opinion that this species has been in steady decline since at least the early 1990's. We (Cook & Toft, 2005) included only those census years where participation effort was comparable in effort and scale between 1994 and 2000. Given the funding and novel public participation at the time, we realized that we were unlikely to establish true population size, but that we could reveal the population's trend through comparable census efforts. Despite increasing participation year over year, census accounts revealed a steady population decline culminating in 50%.

Following the 2005 listing petition (Bond & Teel, 2004) census effort was doubled in sampling time and substantially more aggressive with respect to participation. This elevated effort has since included over 140 people covering all corners of the species range, and is, by all reasonable measures, reliable for estimating true population size. That these more recent censuses initially revealed a somewhat larger population was entirely to be expected. What was hopefully not, however, was an ongoing decline proportional to that observed over the preceding 10 years given the knowledge that we had of the species by that time.

The entire population is now less than half the size of some single historic colonies and its majority continues to suffer unsustainable reproductive replacement (Meese 2011, 2013). Population numbers are now so low for a colonially breeding bird that an irreversible trajectory of extinction could potentially materialize any time, assuming it hasn't already.

The tricolored blackbird is in a state of emergency and emergency protections under state and federal endangered species acts are now called for to preserve this iconic California species. I

trust the Commission will vote to adopt the proposed emergency regulation to add the tricolored blackbird to the list of endangered species pursuant to section 2076.5 of the Fish and Game Code.

Sincerely,
Lizette Cook

Citations

Bond, M. & Teel, J. 2004. Petition to list Tricolored Blackbird under the state and federal endangered species acts and request for emergency action to protect the species. Center for Biological Diversity, Idyllwild, CA.

Cook, L. F., and Toft, C. A. 2005. Dynamics of extinction: Population decline in the colonially nesting Tricolored Blackbird *Agelaius tricolor*. Bird Conservation. International 15:73–88.

Meese, R. J. 2013. Chronic low reproductive success of the colonial Tricolored Blackbird from 2006 – 2001. Western Birds 44:98-113.

Meese, R. J. 2011. Reproductive success of Tricolored Blackbird colonies in 2011 in the Central Valley of California. Calif. Dept. of Fish and Game, Wildlife Branch, Nongame Wildlife Program Report 2011-08, Sacramento, CA.

suscon.org, tricolored blackbird working group. 2009. Conservation plan for the tricolored blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*), 2.0 Update. www.suscon.org

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